

Options to Audiometric Testing

WAC 296-817-500

Summary

YOUR RESPONSIBILITY:

This section provides options to baseline audiometric testing for employees assigned to duties with noise exposures for less than one year. These program options may also be used to provide added assessment of longer-term employees in addition to audiometric testing.

The requirements of this section apply only if you decide to use auditing or a third-party hearing loss prevention program and don't conduct baseline audiometric testing for those employees.

HEARING PROTECTION AUDITS

You must

Conduct hearing protection audits at least quarterly WAC 296-817-50005	500-3
Make sure staff conducting audits are properly trained WAC 296-817-50010	500-4
Assess the hearing protection used by each employee during audits WAC 296-817-50015	500-5
Document your hearing protection audits WAC 296-817-50020	500-5

THIRD-PARTY AUDIOMETRIC TESTING

You must

Make sure third-party hearing loss prevention programs meet the following requirements WAC 296-817-50025	500-6
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Options to Audiometric Testing

WAC 296-817-500

Summary

WAC 296-817-500 (Continued)

Important:

Hearing protection audits are a tool for use in evaluating your hearing loss prevention program in cases where audiometric testing doesn't provide a useful measure. For example, if most of your employees are hired on a temporary basis for a few months at a time, audiometric testing may not identify the small changes in hearing acuity that could occur. Auditing provides an alternative to audiometric testing in these cases.

Auditing isn't required unless you use it in place of baseline audiometric testing for employees hired for a period of less than one year and is permitted as a substitute for audiometric testing only for these employees.

Third-party hearing loss prevention programs are full hearing loss prevention programs and are distinct from audiometric testing provided by third parties as part of your own hearing loss prevention program. These programs may be organized by labor groups, trade associations, labor-management cooperatives, or other organizations to:

- Cover a specific group of employees
- OR**
- Combine efforts for several employers with common employees.

Although you remain responsible for the program, third-party programs can have at least 2 benefits over running your own program:

- The audiometric testing is portable between the participating employers so new testing won't be needed when an employee changes employers
- Employees who only work for short periods for any one employer can be monitored under the group program over a longer period of time increasing the effectiveness of the audiometric testing in preventing hearing loss for these employees.



Options to Audiometric Testing

WAC 296-817-500

Rule

WAC 296-817-50005

Conduct hearing protection audits at least quarterly

You must

- Conduct audits at least quarterly to provide a representative assessment of your workplace
 - The assessment is representative if it:
 - Covers all processes and work activities in your business at full production levels
 - AND**
 - Covers all employees present on the audit day.
 - If your business is mobile or involves variable processes, auditing may need to be repeated more often than quarterly
 - Auditing doesn't need to be repeated more than monthly as long as a reasonable effort is made to cover:
 - The activities with greatest exposure
 - AND**
 - As many employees as possible.
- Assess exposures and hearing protection for the full shift for each employee covered at the time of the audit.



Options to Audiometric Testing

WAC 296-817-500

Rule

WAC 296-817-50010

Make sure staff conducting audits are properly trained

You must

- Make sure staff conducting hearing protection audits:
 - Can demonstrate competence in:
 - Evaluating hearing protection attenuation
 - Evaluating hearing protector choices
 - Assessing the correct use of hearing protectors.
 - Are certified by the Council for Accreditation in Occupational Hearing Conservation (CAOHC) or have training in the following areas:
 - Noise and hearing loss prevention
 - Washington state noise regulations
 - Hearing protectors
 - Fitting of hearing protectors
 - Basic noise measurement
 - Hearing loss prevention recordkeeping.



Options to Audiometric Testing

WAC 296-817-500

Rule

WAC 296-817-50015

Assess the hearing protection used by each employee during audits

You must

- Confirm that:
 - Current site conditions during audits are consistent with conditions existing during noise monitoring
 - The hearing protection used by the employee is sufficient and appropriate for the conditions
 - The hearing protection is worn properly
 - The employees are satisfied with the performance and comfort of the hearing protection.

WAC 296-817-50020

Document your hearing protection audits

You must

- Keep a record of audit results for each employee assessed for the length of their employment and for the length of time you will rely upon the audit results
- Include the following information in the record:
 - The make and model of the hearing protectors
 - The size of the protectors
 - Average noise exposure of the employee
 - Any problems found with use of the hearing protection
 - Any comments or complaints from the employee regarding the hearing protection.



Options to Audiometric Testing

WAC 296-817-500

Rule

THIRD-PARTY AUDIOMETRIC TESTS

WAC 296-817-50025

Make sure third-party hearing loss prevention programs meet the following requirements

Important:

Third-party hearing loss prevention programs are intended for short-term employees hired or assigned to duties having noise exposures **for less than one year and for seasonal employees**. However, other employees may be included as long as you meet all requirements for hearing loss follow-ups and recordkeeping.

You must

- Make sure that the third-party program is:
 - Equivalent to an employer program as required by this chapter
- **AND**
 - Uses audiometric testing to evaluate hearing loss.
- Make sure a licensed or certified audiologist, otolaryngologist, or other qualified physician administers the third-party program
- Make sure the third-party program has written procedures for:
 - Communicating with participating employers of program requirements
 - Follow-up procedures for detected hearing loss
 - Annual review of participating employer programs.

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Options to Audiometric Testing

WAC 296-817-500

Rule

WAC 296-817-50025 (Continued)

- Make sure the following program elements are corrected by you or the third-party program when deficiencies are found:
 - Noise exposures
 - Hearing protection
 - Employee training
 - Noise controls.
 - Obtain a review of your hearing loss prevention program at least once per year, conducted by the third-party program administrator or their representative, in order to:
 - Identify any tasks needing a revised selection of hearing protection
- AND**
- Provide an overall assessment of the employers' hearing loss prevention activities.



Notes
